



## Why Spinoza Had No Aesthetics

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## Why Spinoza Had No Aesthetics

Aesthetics, or the philosophy of art and beauty, has played an important role in some philosophers' thought and had little or no importance in others. In Plato, Plotinus, Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer, for example, art and beauty have a central place in their accounts of man and the world. Other philosophers, for example, Aristotle, Aquinas, and Hume have treated various aesthetic issues, but these have remained somewhat peripheral to their main philosophical concerns. Still others, for example, Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, and Husserl have said almost nothing about art and beauty.<sup>1</sup> Spinoza belongs to this group. The reasons for his lack of interest in aesthetics are not solely or primarily due to a merely personal indifference to art and beauty.<sup>2</sup> Nor, like Descartes, does Spinoza openly express his reasons for his indifference or hostility to art and beauty.<sup>3</sup> Rather, his reasons are philosophical and must be inferred from what he explicitly says. Spinoza's writings contain only a few brief and scattered remarks about art and beauty.<sup>4</sup> Taken separately they are of no great philosophical significance or originality, and taken together they can in no way be construed as constituting even the rudiments of an aesthetic theory.<sup>5</sup> However, when they are placed within the general context of his philosophy as a whole they seem to be natural corollaries of some of his major doctrines. Also, his explicit remarks give adequate clues to why he does not say more. I want to develop this latter point by trying to uncover the deeper philosophical reasons for the absence of a systematic philosophical discussion of art and beauty. I shall argue that the general character of Spinoza's philosophy, as well as some of his central doctrines, not only provide no adequate philosophical basis for an aesthetics but lead to the neglect of aesthetics altogether.

That is, I shall argue that Spinoza's philosophy represents a certain type of philosophy and "cast of mind" which is fundamentally alien to, even hostile towards, art and beauty.

I

I begin with what Spinoza says about art and beauty. There are five places in his writings where he explicitly refers to beauty and ugliness (*pulchritudo*, *deformatas*, *pulcher*, *deformis*).<sup>6</sup> In none of them does he try to define beauty or explain its relation to art. One passage (in the *Tractatus Politicus*) is of little philosophical importance. Spinoza says that men love women primarily because of "the passion of lust" (*affectu libidinis*) and esteem them in proportion to their "beauty" (*pulchritudine*). Since this leads to strife, men and women should not rule together (GIII, 360).<sup>7</sup> The other passages are more general and philosophical. One occurs in the context of Spinoza's criticism of final causes in the Appendix to Part 1 of the *Ethics*. "Beauty" (*Pulchritudinem*) and "ugliness" (*Deformatatem*) are listed with other "notions" (*notiones*) like "good, evil, order, confusion, warm, cold" with which men have "explained natural things."<sup>8</sup> Spinoza claims that these notions arise because men "do not understand the nature of things" and "take the imagination for the intellect" (GII, 81-82). These notions are "nothing but modes of imagining, by which the imagination is variously affected." For example, when we see an object "motions" are caused in our "nerves." When this motion is "conducive to health, the objects by which it is caused are called beautiful; those which cause a contrary motion are called ugly" (GII, 82). Spinoza gives a similar account of why we call something we taste

“sweet or bitter” or something we touch “hard or soft.” All these judgments are based on “the disposition of [one’s] brain,” not the objects themselves (GII, 82).<sup>9</sup>

In the two references to beauty in the Correspondence (Ep. 32, 54), Spinoza says: “I do not attribute beauty, ugliness, order or confusion to Nature. For things cannot, except with respect to our imagination, be called beautiful, or ugly, ordered or confused” (GIV, 170). Spinoza then goes on to discuss the way the parts of nature are related to form a whole. His point—vividly illustrated by the example of the worm in the blood—is that “the connection of the parts” of nature is the conformity of particular events to universal and necessary laws (GIV, 170–171). This conformity to natural law has nothing to do with harmony or proportion: *Natura* is not a *kosmos*. To judge that something is beautiful or ugly means to believe that it is useful or harmful to us, that God has made “the desire and eyes of men” to accord with the world and the world to accord with them (GIV, 252–253). It implies that the world has been designed to serve human ends, desires, and needs. When we come to realize that nothing in nature has been designed for our use, we will stop regarding beauty and ugliness as real qualities and perfections of real things and recognize them to be simply states of ourselves. In Ep. 54 Spinoza again affirms that “Beauty is not so much a quality of the object” [*objecti qualitas*] as an “effect” [*effectus*] in him who perceives it” (GIV, 252). The relativity of beauty is again defended by arguing that the effect varies according to the cause, so that if our “eyes” or “temperament” were different, what now seems beautiful would seem ugly and vice versa (GIV, 252–253). In itself or in relation to God, nothing is beautiful or ugly. The same point is reiterated in the brief reference to beauty in *Descartes’ ‘Principles of Philosophy,’* where Spinoza asserts that beauty is not a “perfection” (*perfectionem*), for it does not belong to the “*reality, or being*” of a thing (GI, 165).

There are eight passages in Spinoza’s writings in which art and the arts (*ars, artes*) are mentioned.<sup>10</sup> Spinoza nowhere tries to define art or state its ultimate purpose. All his remarks about art occur in the context of a discussion of some other issue. For example, in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*, while stating his criticism of final causes, Spinoza claims people believe that

“the structure of the human body” is the result of a “divine, or supernatural art” due to their failure “to understand natural things.” But the relation between the parts of the human body can be adequately understood simply as the result of a “mechanical” art (GII, 81). Later, in Part III of the *Ethics*, he criticizes the belief that the body moves and is at rest because of “the Mind’s command” and that the body “does a great many things which depend only on the Mind’s will and its art of thinking” (*excogitandi arte*) (EIIIP2S). Thus it is not necessary to refer to the mind when explaining “the causes of buildings, of paintings, and of things of this kind.” Their existence can be deduced from “the laws of nature alone” and the nature of the body “without direction of the Mind” (EIIIP2S). In Part IV of the *Ethics* there is a brief reference to “the art of making money” (*lucri artes*) (EIV App.29) and in the Preface to Part V there is a contrast between “the way the Body must be cared for” (*arte Corpus sit curandum*) and “how the intellect must be perfected,” i.e., “Medicine” as opposed to “Logic.”

In Spinoza’s political works there are three brief references to “the arts and the sciences.” In the *Theological-Political Treatise* he says that the arts and sciences are necessary for human perfection and happiness (GIII, 73) and that “liberty is necessary for promoting the sciences and arts” (GIII, 243). In the *Political Treatise* he says that the sciences and arts are best cultivated in a free Republic” (GIII, 346). In these passages it seems clear that by the “arts” Spinoza is thinking primarily of the mechanical arts, whose purpose is the production of objects which are useful for satisfying human needs, rather than the fine arts, which are not produced primarily for any use.<sup>11</sup> The references in the political works to art are therefore not directly relevant to an aesthetics of the fine arts.

## II

Using the above remarks about art and beauty as materials, I shall reconstruct an explanation of why Spinoza never attempted to develop a philosophical aesthetics. I begin with art. For Spinoza, works of art do not constitute a special domain of beings. He regards them merely as physical objects with physical predicates. Artifacts are only one kind of natural physical ob-

ject. Their existence and qualities can be explained in the same way as the existence and qualities of other physical objects, namely, by means of the universal causal laws of extended nature. Since there is no purposive human activity which cannot be explained in terms of efficient causes, the traditional distinction between artificial and natural objects has no metaphysical significance.<sup>12</sup> Traditionally, an artifact—a knife or a painting—was something made for a definite purpose by a being who was capable of conceiving and executing definite purposes, namely, the artist. The nature of the artifact was derivative from the purpose of the artist who made it. What the knife is is a thing for cutting (since it was made to cut), what the painting is is a representation of a man (since it was made to represent a man). A complete description of an artifact, including a description of its peculiar nature as an artifact, had to involve predicates referring to these purposes. But since Spinoza rejects all purposive activity and purposive explanations as distinct categories of activity and explanation, he must also reject the traditional way of distinguishing artificial from natural objects and artists from other human beings.

Just as Spinoza denies that works of art are a distinctive and irreducible category of beings, so he denies that beauty, order, proportion, and symmetry are real qualities of beings. Rather, they are “modes of imagining,” appearances resulting from the actions of beings on our minds and bodies. These apparent qualities vary as their causes vary—what seems beautiful to one seems ugly to another because the mind and body of one are differently affected than those of the other. When we call an object beautiful we are not describing it, but reporting the effect it has on us. Beauty and ugliness are thus not objective and absolute, but subjective and relative. Since beauty is not a “real predicate,” it does not belong to a description or explanation of the world as it really is.

The doctrine that all that exists is nature may be called “naturalism.” Naturalism involves a strong reductionist element. It claims that what seem to ordinary experience to be distinctive and fundamental characteristics are replaceable by descriptions and explanations which do not involve these characteristics. Naturalism thus gives no metaphysical support for a philosophy of art and beauty by defining and preserving for

them a distinctive place in reality. This is why Spinoza can regard his general account of nature as adequately covering all human activities and their products. In short, persons and works of art are not among the ultimate constituents of what is.

Art and beauty belong to the “manifest image” of the world, the world as it appears to the imagination and senses. Spinoza persistently denigrates the latter in favor of reason (*ratio*) and intellect (*intellectus*). This elevation of reason and intellect over the imagination and the senses has a metaphysical and epistemological motive, namely, the doctrine that reality is knowable only by thought. This doctrine, which may be called “rationalism” or “intellectualism,” is present in another form as well, namely, in Spinoza’s moral teaching. There it means that the way one ought to live—freedom, virtue, and happiness—can be known only by thought. Reason alone prescribes those activities which constitute a free, virtuous, and happy life. For Spinoza, such a life is one in which reason dominates the passions.

Now the passions are linked to the imagination and senses. These form a trilogy bound together by passivity. For when we imagine, sense, and have passions we are acted upon or determined by things other than ourselves. By contrast, when we reason and understand we are active, self-determined. Imagination, sense, and passion all involve a lowering of the degree or level of vitality, a decrease in our power over ourselves and other things. The alternative is to master the passions by reason, to change passions into actions, to be active and self-determined (cf. EVP3, 4S). For Spinoza, only reason and understanding can accomplish this. Art and beauty, however, belong to the life of imagination, sense, and passion. If the goal is to free ourselves from bondage and misery we must turn away from art and beauty, which are inseparable from them. Spinoza grounds this rationalist moral doctrine in his rationalist epistemology and metaphysics, for knowledge of how we ought to live requires knowledge of what is real. In both cases reason and intellect give us the truth, imagination and sense, when left to themselves, give us error (EIIP17S; cf. P35S). For Spinoza, only the truth will make us free, and only reason and intellect will give us the truth.

Nevertheless, Spinoza allows that art and

beauty do have a limited “medicinal” value.<sup>13</sup> In a brief passage dealing with the negative and harmful emotions, Spinoza says:

It is the part of a wise man, I say, to refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty [*amaenitate*] of green plants, with decoration [*ornatu*], music, sports, the theatre, and other things of this kind, which anyone can use without injury to another.<sup>14</sup>

“For,” he says “the human Body” has many parts with different “natures, which constantly require new and varied nourishment.” The restoration of the body is in turn important “so that the Mind also may be equally capable of understanding many things” (EIVP45C2S).<sup>15</sup> This implies that the arts and beauty have no intrinsic worth, but merely instrumental value. By directly affecting the body—restoring and maintaining its health—they indirectly contribute to the well-being of the mind, namely, its capacity to know. Art and beauty are thus given an auxiliary role to play in reason’s struggle with the passions. The making and enjoyment of works of art and beautiful things are neither constituent parts of, nor a direct means for, achieving freedom, virtue, and happiness. Aside from their instrumental and medicinal value they are at best distractions from the serious business of life; at worst, they are an indulgence in the very things which lead to bondage, vice, and unhappiness.

Nor does the pleasure which accompanies the enjoyment of art and beauty give them an important place in the good life. Although Spinoza defines pleasure in terms of an increase in activity (EIIIP11S), according to him, mental activity results only from adequate ideas (EIIIP3).<sup>16</sup> The passions and other affects, however, are inadequate, confused ideas (EIVP3D & III Gen. Def. of Affects). This suggests that the only “true pleasures” are those arising from intellectual activity, a suggestion which is confirmed by the opening pages of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*.<sup>17</sup> There Spinoza contrasts what he calls “the true good” (*verum bonum*) to what “men think to be the highest good, namely, wealth, honor, and sensual pleasure” (*libidinem*) (GII, 5–6). The latter goods are defective because they involve “the love of those things that can perish” (GII, 7). The love one feels for them is therefore itself perishable. By contrast, the

true good is “permanent,” for it involves the love of something which is “eternal and infinite.” But the eternal and infinite are accessible only through knowledge. Only knowledge can provide permanent and unmixed happiness because only through knowledge can the mind unite with what is permanent. From the point of view of Spinoza, who seeks “something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity,” the delights afforded by art and beauty would have seemed little different from other counterfeit pleasures (GII, 5). The above conclusion about the insignificance of art and beauty for Spinoza is quite different from the view taken by R.G. Collingwood.<sup>18</sup> Collingwood tries to link his own ideas about the moral function of art to Spinoza’s psychology and epistemology. He claims that Spinoza’s doctrine of adequate ideas confirms his own doctrine that the mind can be liberated from harmful emotions (sc. passions) by the expressive power of art. He emphasizes that Spinoza contrasts imagination with intellect and agrees that “imagination is not an activity but a passivity.”<sup>19</sup> Collingwood also agrees with Spinoza that an emotion is something we undergo, suffer from. But he claims that “this sense of oppression” involved in our emotional life can be overcome when the emotion is expressed. For in being expressed the emotion ceases to be unconscious, and in becoming conscious the “mind is somehow lightened and eased.”<sup>20</sup> Becoming conscious of an emotion is a prerequisite for understanding it. An expressed or conscious emotion is one which is at least partially understood, and the person who has the emotion is to that extent no longer a patient but an agent. The mind gains increasing control over itself by becoming conscious of its emotional states, and it does this by expressing them, i.e., by creating or enjoying works of art.<sup>21</sup> Collingwood describes a mind dominated by unconscious, unexpressed emotion as a “false consciousness,” which is a “disowning” of one’s feelings, in contrast to a “true consciousness [which] is the confession to ourselves of our feelings.”<sup>22</sup> Collingwood claims that “the same doctrine was taught long ago by Spinoza, who has expounded better than any other man the conception of the truthful consciousness and its importance as a foundation for a healthy mental life.”<sup>23</sup> His reason for this is that he thinks that what Spinoza calls “inade-

quate ideas of affections” are basically what he himself means by a “false” or “corrupt consciousness.”<sup>24</sup>

But Collingwood clearly goes too far when he equates Spinoza’s adequate ideas with the expression or becoming conscious of an emotion. For Spinoza, an adequate idea involves much more than consciousness. It is a product of the intellect and involves a complete understanding of the causes of a thing. As such, it implies having an explanation of it. What Collingwood means by expressing an emotion is not being able to understand or explain the causes of it, but becoming aware of the emotion, knowing that *this* is the emotion I am feeling. He never makes the anachronistic suggestion that Spinoza held that the proper function of art is the expression of emotion. Nor does he claim that Spinoza held that the making and enjoyment of art is a way of converting our inadequate, confused ideas (passions) into adequate, clear ones (actions). As we have seen, Spinoza never says that art or beauty could play any role in controlling, directing or transforming the passions other than the auxiliary one of maintaining bodily health. Though art may be more than a diversion from the cares of life, it is far from being a necessary constituent of a healthy and happy life. Spinoza’s emphasis on the connection of emotion to the imagination, senses, and body excludes any possibility that, like Collingwood, he could regard the expression of emotion through art as making a direct and indispensable contribution to the mind’s domination of the passions and the freedom of the individual human being.<sup>25</sup>

### III

If what I have argued above is, at least in broad outline, correct, the problem is not just that Spinoza’s philosophy offers a “barren soil” for cultivating an aesthetics.<sup>26</sup> Rather, the ground it supplies is too hard and intractable to motivate anyone from even attempting to sow it. In other words, Spinoza’s basic philosophical position, especially what I have called his naturalism and rationalism, together with their reductionist implications, provide no motivation for taking art and beauty seriously as themes of a philosophical aesthetics. Naturalism means that works of art have no special metaphysical status (i.e., are not irreducible to physical objects) and that beau-

ty is not a real (objective and absolute) quality of things. Rationalism means that only by thought (not by the imagination or senses) can we know the true nature of things. Now it can be objected that none of these doctrines *logically implies* that art and beauty cannot be the subject-matter of a philosophical aesthetics. I am willing to grant this. But I maintain that when these metaphysical and epistemological doctrines are *combined* with *moral rationalism*, the implications for aesthetics become more evident. For, as we have seen above, Spinoza’s moral rationalism means that the emotions, which are linked to the imagination and senses, are the source of unfreedom, vice, and unhappiness.<sup>27</sup> This implies that the good life is possible only if the passions are mastered; and this, Spinoza holds, can only be done by reason and the intellect. Herein lies, I believe, the ultimate basis of Spinoza’s philosophical neglect of aesthetics.<sup>28</sup> For once the good life is *identified* with the life of reason, and reason is *opposed* to emotion, imagination, and sense, art and beauty become suspect. They are regarded as either irrelevant or hostile to man’s highest and deepest interests. This leads to their being either trivialized into harmless distractions or vilified as corrupting seducers.<sup>29</sup>

It would seem, then, that a philosophy of art and beauty is possible only if Spinozistic naturalism and rationalism are radically modified, if not rejected.<sup>30</sup> Such a modification would, of course, alter Spinoza’s philosophy beyond recognition. It is thus a change which he himself could not approve. The alternative is not merely to readjust the web of Spinoza’s doctrines to find a place for art and beauty but to construct a very different web which contains them as constituent strands directly connected with the central core. But this is a task beyond the limits of the present paper, which is intended only to show *why* one must look away from Spinozism if one wants to reflect philosophically about art and beauty.

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1. For an attempt to reconstruct a Cartesian aesthetics, see Émile Krantz, *Essai sur L'Ésthetique de Descartes* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1889).

2. Spinoza's early biographer, Colerus, reports that Spinoza possessed skill in drawing and did a portrait of himself: see *The Life of Spinoza by Colerus*, in Frederick Pollock, *Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1880), p. 417.

3. Descartes's derogatory comments about poetry and eloquence are in the first chapter of the *Discours de la Méthode*.

4. I use the standard edition of Spinoza's *Opera*, 4 vols., ed. Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1925). (This work is designated by G, volume numbers by Roman numerals and page numbers by Arabic numerals.) English translations of the *Ethica* and *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* are from *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1, trans. & ed. by Edwin Curley (Princeton University Press, 1985). English translations of the letters are from A. Wolf, *Spinoza's Correspondence* (London: Frank Cass, 1928). The translations of passages from the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and *Tractatus Politicus* are my own, since there is no reliable English translation of these works.

5. The most extensive and detailed attempt to construct an *ipotesi intorno al concetto spinoziano dell'arte* is by Filippo Mignini, *Ars Imaginandi* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1981), p. 7 & chapters 6–8 passim. Mignini's book contains a great deal of useful historical background, but the actual reconstruction of Spinoza's aesthetic thought is highly speculative since it goes far beyond what the scant materials supplied by Spinoza himself could justify. In effect, Mignini admits this, since he argues that a Spinozistic aesthetics is possible only on the basis of a radically new and non-traditional conception of aesthetics. (See my comments in Note 26 below.) Franz Schlerath's *Spinoza und die Kunst* (Hellerau bei Dresden, 1920) is less ambitious but more convincing. He stays within the framework of traditional aesthetic concepts and issues and interprets Spinoza's texts from within this framework. There are two books dealing with Spinoza and the art of his time, W.R. Valentiner, *Rembrandt and Spinoza* (London: Phaidon, 1957) and Leo Balet, *Rembrandt and Spinoza* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1962). The latter, however, shows no understanding of Spinoza's philosophy and is of little use. Howard Selsam, "Spinoza: Art and Geometry" in *Studies in the History of Ideas*, vol. III (Columbia University Press, 1935), discusses the aesthetic significance of Spinoza's use of the geometrical method. For some suggestive analogies between Baroque art and Spinoza's philosophical thought, see Carl Gebhardt, "Rembrandt und Spinoza," *Chronicum Spinozanum*, vol. IV (The Hague: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1926), pp. 160–183 and Stanislaw Dunin-Bokowski, *Spinoza*, vol. II (Druck und Verlag der Aschenдорffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1933–1936), pp. 322–344.

6. See Emilia Giancotti Boscherini, ed., *Lexicon Spinozanum*, 2 vols., (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), s.v.

7. See Spinoza's remarks about sex, marriage, and the "external appearance" (*forma*) of women in EIV, Ap.19–20.

8. See Spinoza's remarks about the "universal notions" of reason in EIIP40S1. Although these are essentially different

from the "common notions" formed by the imagination, the question might be asked whether the latter could be replaced by or transformed into the former. That is, could generic images become rational or intellectual ideas? Spinoza seems to suggest this occurs in the case of moral notions, e.g., good and evil. For example, his statement that "we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it" and not the reverse seems to express common opinion (EIIP9S). By contrast, Spinoza's own definition of good, "By good I shall understand what we certainly know to be useful to us" seems to express a rational understanding of what good really means (EIVD1). However, I can find no suggestion in Spinoza's texts that the same distinction might hold of aesthetic ideas, e.g., beauty and ugliness.

9. Spinoza quotes with approval "such sayings as 'So many heads, so many attitudes'" (EI, Ap).

10. The reader should keep in mind that in the following passages Spinoza is conforming to seventeenth century usage, according to which *ars* does not refer exclusively to what we today call "fine art." One should therefore not assume that the references have any aesthetic significance.

11. Spinoza never makes an explicit distinction between the mechanical and fine arts. See note 10 above.

12. This is Spinoza's point about the similarity between "sleepwalkers" and "human skill." Since sleepwalkers are "senseless," their bodily movements cannot be explained by the actions of their minds; rather, they must be explained by other bodily movements. So too, the artist should be regarded as a kind of sleepwalker: what he does can be explained without reference to his will or purposes (EIIP2S). This view is grounded in Spinoza's doctrine that an act of will is the efficient (not final) cause of an action (EIP32C2).

13. In his discussion of Spinoza's "psychotherapy," Jonathan Bennett distinguishes three "techniques" which Spinoza recommends for increasing "the mind's power over the affects": "separating and joining" (EVP2), "turning passions into actions" (EVP3), and "reflecting on determinism" (EVP6). *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1984), pp. 329–342. As examples of such psychotherapy, Bennett mentions listening to Wagner and thinking of a Chardin pastel or Mozart Quartet (pp. 335, 337).

14. For Spinoza, all emotions (*affectus*) are harmful insofar as they are "passions" (*passiones*). He makes the distinction between passive and active emotions in EIIP57S and P58, but in general he tends to neglect it and to treat all emotions as passions.

15. R.J. Delahunty emphasizes this point in *Spinoza* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 270.

16. *Mentis actiones ex solis ideis adaequatis oriuntur; passiones autem à solis inadaequatis pendunt.*

17. Delahunty asserts that Spinoza regards intellectual pleasures as superior to all others, and the life of the intellect as the most pleasant life. But he thinks that Spinoza is wrong to conclude from this that a life consisting *only* of these is the best life: *Spinoza*, p. 278. See Spinoza's characteristic claim that "An affect [*affectus*] is only evil, or harmful, insofar as it prevents the Mind from being able to think (by IVP26 and P27)" (EVP9D). And it is the intellect (*intellectus*) which transforms passive emotions into active ones (EVP10D).

18. R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford University Press, 1938).

19. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 109–10.

21. “The characteristic mark of expression proper is lucidity or intelligibility.” *Ibid.*, p. 122.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

25. Schlerath likewise concludes that *der Künstler kann kein in sich geschlossener, selbstständiger Mensch sein*, that he is *unselbständig, schwankend, unfrei, geknechtet von seinen Vorstellungen und seiner Phantasie*. *Spinoza und die Kunst*, pp. 51, 58. See also Schlerath’s remarks about the two defects of beauty (*ibid.*, p. 70).

26. See C. De Deugd, *The Significance of Spinoza’s First Kind of Knowledge* (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp., 1966), p. 43. De Deugd makes several insightful comments about the role of the imagination in Spinoza’s theory of knowledge and its relation to aesthetics. For example, his assertion that Spinoza’s doctrine of the imagination is “clearly at variance with our present-day high esteem for the imagination as one of the foremost creative impulses of man—both inside and outside the aesthetic realm” and the conception of the “Romantics” of the imagination as “mental activity and creative power,” *ibid.*, p. 74. Mignini agrees that in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* Spinoza held that *l’immaginazione denuncia, invece, l’assoluta passività della mente e la sua dipendenza delle leggi di un altro, cioè dal corpo e dalla successione fortuita delle sue affezioni* (*Ars Imaginandi.*, p. 10; see also pp. 108–110). But he argues that later, in the *Short Treatise* and the *Ethics*, Spinoza came to regard the imagination as an “active faculty” and was *consapevole della capacità poetica e produttiva della immaginazione* (*ibid.*, pp. 10, 57).

27. Bennett asserts that “a tendency to denigrate the senses is visible throughout parts IV & V of the *Ethics*” (*Spinoza’s*

*Ethics.*, p. 324). See also Bennett’s reasons for his claim that “Spinoza is in a bind about the place of sense perception in the life of a free man” and his remarks about “Spinoza’s intellectualism” and rejection of the “reactive attitude” for the “objective attitude”: *Ibid.*, pp. 324, 342–343.

28. In his commentary on #63 of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, De Deugd speaks of “Spinozistic thought” exhibiting “characteristic rationalistic patterns of thinking in general” and an “anti-aesthetic” and “anti-artistic trend.” *The Significance of Spinoza’s First Kind of Knowledge.*, p. 77.

29. J.W.T.E. Sikkes disagrees with this view. He asserts that, for Spinoza, the “truly beautiful,” by means of sense-perception, widens our conceptual understanding and leads us to an intuitive insight into “Mind as the unity of all things,” and that art is “symbolic” of the infinite and eternal in the form of the finite and temporal. He claims further that these are among the “fundamentals” of a “Spinozistic aesthetic”: *Spinoza: Leer en Leven* (Servire/Wassenaar, 1976), p. 180. However, I find no basis for these claims in Spinoza’s own texts. Sikkes seems to be anachronistically applying Romantic views about art to Spinoza, to whom they are quite alien. On this point, see my criticism above of Collingwood’s use of Spinoza.

30. D.W. Hamlyn gives a good reason for its rejection when he says that, “The Spinozistic tradition ... associates passivity with irrationality and ignorance or confused consciousness. But the ideal of a rationality that goes with an activity of mind which can transcend the confusedness of passivity has little to do with anything human.” Spinoza’s ideal, he concludes, is “a likely recipe for self-deception”: “Self-Knowledge” in *The Self: Psychological and Philosophical Issues*, ed. Theodore Mischel (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 193.